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Subject FW: Phosphate Mine Request May Test New Regulations

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Subject: Phosphate Mine Request May Test New Regulations

Tampa Tribune, Published: **Nov 18, 2005**

Phosphate Mine Request May Test New Regulations

By **MARK HOLAN**

TAMPA - -- Mosaic Phosphates Co. wants to expand mining in eastern Hillsborough County, raising concern about potential harm to underground and surface water supplies.

Company officials call such concerns "unjustified or exaggerated."

Mosaic wants to add 743 acres to the southeastern edge of its Hopewell Mine, south of Plant City, extending the operation five years beyond its anticipated 2013 closing.

But the company, which has mined phosphate in the area for more than 20 years, is bumping up against a year-old update of the county's wellhead protection ordinance, which provides buffer zones around underground water sources.

County regulators say Mosaic should apply for a special permit that requires county commissioners to find "an overriding public interest" before allowing mining in the area.

Mosaic says the wellhead rules do not apply to its operation because it is regulated by a separate phosphate mining ordinance. Company officials have made two visits this month to commissioners and legal staff to protest the county staff position.

"The discussion is directed at what is the current interpretation of these rules as it relates to phosphate mining in Hillsborough County," said Mosaic spokesman Gray Gordon, who attended some of the meetings.

County Attorney Renee Lee has scheduled commissioners to review the ordinance Dec. 13.

Mosaic's application is to be decided at another meeting in January.

Commissioner Ronda Storms, who represents the district that includes the mine, leans toward the company's interpretation of the rules.



"For the board to have a back-door policy that would shut down the phosphate industry is completely unintentional," Storms said.

She said other rules are in place to protect the water supply.

The proposed expansion is near Tampa Bay Water's South-Central Hillsborough Regional Wellfield and adjacent to a tributary of the Alafia River.

The wells provide drinking water for 250,000 Hillsborough customers, and water pumped from the Alafia is distributed in Hillsborough, Pasco and Pinellas counties.

"There is a great interest for us to protect the public's drinking water," said Tampa Bay Water's chief engineer, Jon Kennedy.

The Hopewell Mine has expanded nearly a dozen times in the past.

Gordon said mining is under way closer to groundwater wells than the proposed expansion area is.

"It's no different than any other time we've expanded," he said.

The difference this time, Kennedy said, is that Mosaic's latest request is coming after the passage of tougher wellhead protection rules.

Plymouth, Minn.-based Mosaic, formed in October 2004 from the merger of IMC Global Inc. and Cargill Crop Nutrition, operates five other mines in Florida.

Mosaic employs about 3,700 workers in the state, including 95 at the Hopewell Mine.

In July, Mosaic agreed to pay a \$270,000 fine and reduce process water storage at its Riverview fertilizer plant.

The company's agreement with county and state officials was related to the September 2004 spill of polluted process water into Archie Creek due to high winds from Hurricane Frances.